



VETERINARY IRELAND POLICY

MUTILATIONS OF ANIMALS

Background

The Veterinary Profession has traditionally defended the welfare interests of animals by persuasion and education and a veterinary surgeon's primary interest is always that of the animal under his/her care. The profession has sought to influence the production climate and the development of welfare legislation in the interest of animals through the special relationship with his/her client, which is based on trust and respect.

Veterinary Surgeons have the interests of the individual animal at the forefront of their consideration. They have traditional surgical skills and the ability to define and solve animal – based problems. These skills allow the development of trust by both the client and the public that animals are kept and housed in acceptable conditions, which take into account the ethological and welfare needs of the species involved.

This position statement should be considered in conjunction with the Veterinary Ireland position statement number 4 “Welfare issues regarding standard husbandry procedures in farmed animals” and in conjunction with the position statement on “Tail Docking In Dogs and Other Acts of Mutilation In Animals 2009”.

Mutilation in this context means the carrying out of a non-therapeutic procedure that involves interference with the sensitive tissues or bone structure of an animal. The ethical acceptability of a mutilation procedure on any animal is determined by whether it is conducted for therapeutic practical economic or cosmetic reasons.

The term mutilation includes a wide range of surgical interferences in many species and some of those are carried out for the following reasons:

- Cosmetic, tail docking or ear cropping in dogs (undesirable, unethical and vets refuse to carry these out)
- Correction of genetic defects the result of in-breeding or intensive selection.
- For animal control and human safety eg. castration/nose ringing of bulls, ear tagging & marking.
- To prevent damage or disease of sufficient severity to cause cruelty or injury on a routine husbandry basis, eg. tail docking in lambs, de-budding, de-horning in cattle, de-teething and de-tailing in piglets and de-beaking in laying hens.

Routine mutilation should not be used as a substitute for the development of environmental or husbandry means adapted to the needs of the animal. There is therefore an ethical pressure to develop animal husbandry systems which minimize the necessity to carry out routine surgical interferences such as de-teething and de-tailing, castration and de-horning. The necessity to carry out preventative mutilation must be contingent on continuous monitoring under veterinary supervision and real efforts to improve the systems should be demonstrated as part of this supervision.

Position

Veterinary Ireland believes that the surgical alterations of individual animals may only be performed in the interests of the welfare of the animal or its herd.

Mutilations such as ear cropping or tail docking of dogs, which are done for cosmetic purposes are considered ethically unacceptable and veterinary surgeons should refrain from performing these techniques.

Veterinary Ireland supports the general position of the Federation of European Veterinarians (FVE) that de-tailing of cattle and horses is unethical. It is illegal except in individual cases where the surgery is necessary following injury.

The de-tailing of lambs and pigs is justified in order to prevent soiling and fly strike from the parasitism in lambs and tail biting and associated vice and injury in pigs. The regulations state that it should not be routinely conducted. Veterinary Ireland support the promotion of better environments/ management in pig production and research to reduce the incidence of tail biting. The position on tail docking, teeth clipping and de-beaking in poultry is that these are real mutilations which only if necessary should be carried out early in life, ideally with anaesthesia, and analgesia using trained and skilled operators.

A similar view applies to castration, de-budding and de-horning. De-horning certainly is a veterinary procedure as is castration of older animals. Velveting of deer is illegal in Ireland.

Ethical Position:

Veterinary Ireland supports the Veterinary Council of Ireland revised Code of Professional Conduct for Veterinary Practitioners 2007 on this issue which states:

“GUIDELINES FOR SURGERY

A veterinary practitioner shall not perform an act of veterinary surgery on an animal, which causes it pain or suffering unless it is in the interest of the animal or other animals, or society. —SURGERY NOT TO BE PERFORMED TO CONCEAL GENETIC DEFECTS —

A veterinary practitioner shall not perform any surgical operation or medical treatment on an animal, the primary purpose of which is to conceal its true genetic status and/or enhance, by deception its value for sale, breeding or showing in competition||

Legal Position

Tail docking in Bovines and in Deer is illegal.

Bovines: The Protection of Animals Kept For Farming Purposes Act 1984 (Bovine Animals) (Prohibition on Tail Docking) Regulations 2003 states:

1. A person shall not remove or mutilate or cause or permit another person to remove or mutilate the tail or part of the tail of a bovine animal.
2. A person shall not have in his or her possession or under his or her control, sell or supply a bovine animal if the tail or part of the tail of the animal has been removed or mutilated in contravention of paragraph (1).
3. Regulation 2 shall not apply to the removal of the tail of a bovine animal -
(a) under and in accordance with a license granted under section 8 of the Cruelty to Animals Act 1876 (39 & 40 Vict.c 77), or

(b) after administration of an anesthetic, by a registered veterinary surgeon where, in his or her opinion, it is necessary for the proper treatment of disease or injury in a single animal.

Deer: WELFARE OF DEER REGULATIONS - 1994 S.I. No. 267/1994 states:

4. No person shall remove, or cause or permit to be removed, the antlers of a deer or any part of them while those antlers are in live velvet.

5. Nothing in Regulation 4 of these Regulations shall apply to the removal of the antlers of a deer or any part of them if the removal is carried out—

a) under and in accordance with a license under section 8 of the Cruelty to Animals Act, 1876, as amended and adapted,

b) in an emergency, for the purpose of saving life, treating an injury or relieving pain in that or any other animal or in man, or

c) by a veterinary surgeon where, in his opinion—

i. disease or injury is present, and

ii. the proper treatment for the disease or injury is, or includes, such removal:

Provided however that nothing in this paragraph shall be deemed to authorise the removal of the antlers of a deer or any part of them without the use of an anesthetic so administered by a veterinary surgeon as to prevent any pain during the removal.

European Position:

Veterinary Ireland supports the following:

(a) The FVE position on tail docking states that mutilations should not be used to adapt the animal to the environment, in contrast the environment should be adapted to the needs of the animal.

(b) The position of the Standing Committee of the European Convention for the Protection of Animals Kept for Farming Purposes is outlined in **The PRELIMINARY DRAFT RECOMMENDATION CONCERNING CATTLE** states:

—For the purpose of this recommendation "mutilation" means a procedure carried out other than for therapeutic or diagnostic purposes and resulting in damage to or the loss of a sensitive part of the body or the alteration of bone structure.

The mutilation of cattle shall be generally prohibited; measures shall be taken to

The position of the standing Committee of the European Convention for the Protection of Animals avoid the need for such procedures, for example the selection of appropriate breeds of cattle.

Exception to this general prohibition may be made by the competent authority only in respect of the following mutilations. All procedures shall be performed on animals in a way so as to avoid unnecessary or prolonged pain or distress. All procedures shall be performed by a veterinarian or other competent person trained in these procedures, and, except for marking or nose ringing, shall be carried out under anaesthesia followed by prolonged analgesia.

a. Destruction or removal of the horn producing area (disbudding) to avoid dehorning

b. Dehorning, only if necessary to avoid welfare problems and if performed by surgical removal of the horns;

- c. Nose ringing;
- d. The removal of supernumerary teats;
- e. Castration of bulls and bull-calves;
- f. Marking by ear tagging, [ear notching], tattooing, freeze-branding methods or implantation of an electronic device;
- g. Vasectomy.||

References

Mutilations Background Paper *welfare doc 004 2008* Veterinary Ireland Position Statement: Welfare issues regarding standard husbandry procedures in farmed animals‘

Veterinary Ireland Position Statement on: Tail Docking In Dogs and Other Acts of Mutilation in Animals 2009

Veterinary Council revised Code of Professional Conduct for Veterinary Practitioners 2007

The European Communities Protection of Animals Kept For Farming Purposes Act 1984 (Bovine Animals) (Prohibition on Tail Docking) Regulations 2003. SI 263 2003

The **PRELIMINARY DRAFT RECOMMENDATION CONCERNING CATTLE** of The Standing Committee of the European Convention for the Protection of Animals Kept for Farming Purposes 2007-2008

The Irish Statute Book